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John G. Talbot
1860

R E M A R K S

ON A

PETITION

PRESENTED TO HER MAJESTY,

FOR A

REVISION OF THE LITURGY,

SIGNED BY 460 CLERGYMEN.

BY

F. B. WOODWARD, M.A.

CHAPLAIN TO THE ENGLISH CONGREGATION AT ROME.

LONDON:

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1860.

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To make the following remarks intelligible to those who may not have seen the Document on which I comment, I think it advisable here to reprint it *in extenso*. I give it as it appeared in the *Guardian* of September 28, 1859:—

“To the Queen’s Most Excellent Majesty in Council. The humble petition of the undersigned Clergy of the Church of England, sheweth—

“That your Majesty’s petitioners approach the throne of your Majesty with feelings of fervent loyalty and devotion; and having had their attention directed to various proceedings, in Parliament and elsewhere, relating to alterations in the Book of Common Prayer, that they respectfully ask permission to bear their testimony to the importance of the subject.

“2. That the experience of your Majesty’s petitioners leads them to coincide in the opinion that abbreviation is an important principle in the work of alteration or revision, and that no new doctrine should be introduced; and if additional services or prayers are contemplated, they desire to leave this, under God, to the wisdom of their superiors in ecclesiastical concerns.

“3. That a change in the Lessons they could desire to see; substituting portions from the Canonical Scriptures for such as are taken from the Apocrypha, and those portions being generally shorter than some which are now appointed to be read; that there are cases, also, in which lessons called “proper” might well be changed for others more appropriate, and that proper second

Lessons, as well as first, might be appointed for all Sundays in the year, with good effect.

“4. That a beneficial abbreviation might be found in discontinuing the congregational use of the Athanasian Creed, especially as the doctrines of it (sound as your Majesty’s Petitioners believe them to be) are too abstrusely expressed for common worship, and are all found in other parts of the Liturgy; also that the other two Creeds might be so placed in juxtaposition, as that one or the other, and not both, might be used in the same service, or combination of services, ‘at the discretion of the minister;’ that one of the prayers for the Queen in the Communion Service might be placed in like manner in connexion with that in the Daily Service, and used as an alternative with it, the other in the Communion Service being put away; and that, in consistency with this arrangement, it would be sufficient if the Lord’s Prayer were used twice in the Morning Service with Communion, and once in the Evening Service.

“5. That the observance of Saints’ Days was matter of strong objection in the Conference of 1661, and, though the services appointed for them are not in themselves examples of the idolatrous worship of saints, yet that the observance appears to many to countenance this error; the most distant tendency to which cannot be too jealously kept clear of by the Church of Christ; that Apostolic examples, therefore, should be made edifying by ministerial teaching, and the only days for which permanent special Services are reserved should be those which have special reference to the great events of our blessed Saviour’s life and death, the coming of the Holy Ghost, and the Commemoration of the Holy Trinity.

“6. That the Burial Service should be so cleared of passages inapplicable to some deceased persons as to

remove the just scruples already expressed under the signatures of nearly four thousand of our Clergy, many of them still hoping for relief in relation to this subject with anxious expectation.

“7. That it would also be a great relief if the absolution in the Visitation of the Sick, which seems, as some think, to be more than merely declarative, were delivered from all appearance of being an absolution by priestly authority, giving it the semblance of a dangerous error.

“8. That similar ideas and sensations suggest themselves respecting the expressions in our Consecration and Ordination Services, which appear to imply (however they may be otherwise explained) the giving of the Holy Ghost by human hands.

“9. That the like regret is felt by many on the subject of the communication of the Holy Ghost by the administration of Holy Baptism, as our Ritual seems to express it; that the unhappy divisions which prevail in our Church on this subject might be closed for ever by an alteration in the Baptismal Service, which should exclude the sponsorial element, and such portions as seem to imply Regeneration, or the Birth of the Spirit in or by Baptism: that very beautiful services would remain; and the form of Baptism, given in charge by our Lord to His Apostles, having no such implication, they may be perfectly Scriptural without it.

“10. That it results from the judgment of your Majesty’s highest tribunal in matters ecclesiastical (however that judgment may be viewed) that the Churchmanship of those who, like your Majesty’s petitioners, do not hold Baptismal Regeneration in the absolute sense, is no less good than that of those who do; and that, therefore, your Majesty’s petitioners are honest and consistent

Churchmen in using the Baptismal Ritual in a sense which avoids that view, according to the judgment.

“11. That they wish, therefore, only for what is just and reasonable, in desiring a ritual clear in terms from what they are authorized to eschew in fact; and that they humbly ask why language occasioning continued dissension, without giving the palm of superior Churchmanship to one party more than another, should remain in a formulary which might be complete without it? And your Majesty’s petitioners are the more solicitous upon this subject, because it is notoriously the chief occasion of disturbance to the peace of the Church, so ardently to be desired for her efficiency, and a cause (as your petitioners believe) of keeping many out of her Communion who would otherwise be glad to join it.

“12. That it remains to be observed, in connexion with what has been said, that the Office for Confirmation would of course require to be conformed to that of Infant Baptism; that the Catechism also would require the same conformity, as well as other corrections; and that, in fact, the adoption or construction of another in agreement, for the most part, with the original Catechism of King Edward VI., but more concise and brief in its questions and answers, would be a most valuable acquisition.

“13. That other alterations might be alluded to, both in the body and the rubrics of the Liturgy, which must readily suggest themselves as the work proceeds. The Litany, for instance, on Sunday mornings might be appointed only for the second and fourth Sundays of the month, a proportionate quantity of the daily prayers from and after the *Jubilate* being disused for that time, as also when the Litany is used on week days; and that the effect would be that of orderly variety, as well

as of abbreviation; that the forms, also, for the 5th of November, the 29th of May, and the 30th of January, might be relinquished; and generally all obsolete terms be exchanged for others now more appropriate.

“14. That on these grounds your petitioners most humbly pray that your Majesty, by and with the advice of your Privy Council, will be graciously pleased to take the premises into your royal consideration, and to appoint a Commission for the revision of the Book of Common Prayer, in harmony with the views hereby most respectfully submitted to your Majesty; and if it become law that persons hereafter to be ordained, on being instituted or licensed to any benefice with cure of souls, shall therein use the new form only, nevertheless that it may be lawful for those who have been already ordained, and have subscribed the second article of the Thirty-sixth Canon, to continue the use of the old form; until, being possessed of any benefice, the new form shall be voluntarily adopted by them together with a majority of their seat-holders, and in the case of chapters and colleges, until it be so adopted by the heads and majorities of the ruling powers thereof.

“15. And that, finally, your Majesty’s petitioners advance nothing touching their assent and consent to the Liturgy as it is, but earnestly plead for improvements, of which it is obviously, urgently, and easily susceptible, as they would seek alterations for the better in the laws of the land, to which they bear true allegiance; and that, commending both your most gracious Majesty and themselves to the mercy and goodness of God, your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray,” &c.

REMARKS,

&c.

THE first reflections suggested by the perusal of this Petition are these three :—

1. That it is matter of no surprise that the writers of it should fail to appreciate the beauty and symmetry of the English Ritual.

2. That should Her Majesty be advised to grant their Prayer, it is to be hoped that the Royal Commissioners will not be chosen from among the composers of this document. If we are to have a new Prayer Book, at least let us have it in good English ¹.

¹ I certainly cannot coincide with Lord Ebury in his estimate of the literary merits of this composition. (See Correspondence with Lord Lyttelton in *Guardian*, Sept. 7.) His Lordship considers it remarkable for “clearness and propriety of diction;” whereas it seems to me that there is not a tolerably written sentence in it from beginning to end. The following are only specimens of the slovenly style in which the writers think it seemly to address Her Majesty :—

3. That an attack on the Prayer Book so utterly feeble in itself, could claim no notice, were it not that it has gained adventitious importance from a Peer of Parliament having thought it worth his

Paragraph 3. "A change in the Lessons they *could* desire to see." But indeed the whole paragraph is of a piece.

Paragraph 4. "That the " Apostles' and Nicene " Creeds might be *so placed in juxtaposition* as that one or the other, not both, might be used." Again, the Lord's Prayer being "used twice in the Morning Service," &c., they speak of as being "*in consistency with*" their proposed arrangement regarding the Prayers for the Queen—as if the one had the slightest connexion with the other.

Paragraph 5. "The only days for which permanent special Services *are* reserved, *should be* those which have special reference," &c. According to my notions of "propriety of diction," "are" and "should be" ought to change places.

Paragraph 8. "Similar ideas and sensations suggest themselves." Similar to what? Besides "sensations suggesting themselves" is nonsense. Any of the petitioners suffering from toothache would think it an odd question if he were asked whether much pain was suggesting itself.

Paragraph 9. "The like regret." Like to what? No regret had been previously expressed.

Paragraph 12. "Adoption *or* construction" of a new Catechism. As probably there is not an existing Catechism on earth which meets the requirements they express, I presume that by this phrase they mean "construction *and* adoption."

Paragraph 13. On the days on which they allow the Litany to be used, they desire that "a proportionate quantity of the daily prayers" may be omitted. Proportionate to what?

Paragraph 15. They speak of the Liturgy being "urgently susceptible" of improvements!

while to circulate it among the Members of the House to which he belongs².

I have called this Petition an attack on the Prayer Book; for such substantially is its character. The petitioners profess, indeed, to ask only for a Revision; but as they require the Revision to be carried out "in harmony with the views" which they have "submitted to Her Majesty," we have but to look at the "views" so "submitted" to perceive that what they call "Revision" is in fact Mutilation, and that on a large scale. We have, indeed, the usual heavy common-places about the Proper Lessons, and the Absolution in the Visitation of the Sick. But with the exception of recommending changes in these two, and one or two other trifling alterations, their "views" develop themselves in the following *excisions* from the formularies of the Church:—

1. The Apocryphal Lessons, extending as they do over near two months of the year, besides some Holydays.

2. The Athanasian Creed, *in toto*.

3. One or other of the other Creeds, on every Sunday and Holyday throughout the year.

4. The Prayer for the Queen in the Communion Service.

² See Correspondence between Lord Lyttelton and Lord Ebury.

5. The Lord's Prayer *four times* on every day on which the Holy Communion is celebrated; and, I presume, *three times* on every other day.

6. The Collects, Epistles, and Gospels for at least twenty³ Holydays, together with the Proper Lessons for the same which have not already been cut off by No. 1.

7. The Communion Service, and Proper Psalms for Ash-Wednesday.

8. The Burial Service to be "cleared of" certain "passages" not specified.

9. A similar "clearing" to be applied to "our Consecration and Ordination Services," in regard of certain "expressions" which to the petitioners "appear to imply," and to the bulk of Christendom appear very plainly to enunciate, a certain very important doctrine.

10. The "Baptismal Service" to be subjected to a double "clearing;" the "sponsorial element to be

³ I am giving them the benefit of the most liberal interpretation of their words. They say,

"the only days for which permanent special services are reserved, should be those which have special reference to the great events of our Saviour's Life and Death, the coming of the Holy Ghost, and the commemoration of the Holy Trinity."

They best know whether they will thank me for my generosity in assuming that they would allow the following to remain;—the Circumcision, the Epiphany, the Purification, the Annunciation, the five days of Holy Week besides Good Friday, Monday and Tuesday in Easter Week, Ascension Day, and Monday and Tuesday in Whitsun Week.

excluded," as well as "such portions as seem to imply Regeneration, or the Birth of the Spirit in or by Baptism." And as the exclusion of these two "elements" might seem to some very like the exclusion of the whole *Service*, they console us by the assurance that "very beautiful *Services* would remain."

11. The "Office for Confirmation" to be "conformed to that of Infant Baptism;" of course, by the "exclusion" of the same two offending "elements."

12. The Church Catechism to be reduced to the "same conformity" by a like process, as well as to be submitted to "other corrections." It seems that in the case of the Catechism subtraction has not the singular property of multiplication that it has as applied to the Baptismal Service; for we are not told that after this double expurgation "very beautiful *Catechisms* would remain." On the contrary, the petitioners hint that the handiest way of dealing with the Catechism would be to get rid of it altogether. For they proceed to acquaint Her Majesty that "in fact the adoption or construction [construction and adoption?] of another" "would be a most valuable acquisition."

Here the petitioners pause in their work of demolition, apparently from sheer exhaustion, not from any lack of obnoxious matter to be got rid of, for they say that "other alterations might be alluded

to, both in the body and the rubrics of the Liturgy, which must readily suggest themselves, as the work" of revision "proceeds." However, as they have the pruning knife still in their hands, before they resign it to the Commissioners, they think they may as well just give a parting cut; and, accordingly, in mere wantonness,—

13. They lop off the Litany from twenty-eight Sundays in the year. And this arbitrary and unmeaning distinction between these Sundays and the other twenty-four, they call "orderly variety," and speak of it as an alteration which "must readily suggest itself!!" They add that on the days on which they would allow the Litany to be used, "a proportionate quantity of the daily prayers, from and after the *Jubilate*" should be "disused for that time." From this proviso I really can gather nothing but their intense love of lopping. It seems to be merely a cut at random. For if I rightly understand their very awkward expressions, it would seem that what they propose to do, is already done by the existing rubric⁴: unless, indeed, they mean to enlarge the provisions of the rubric by—

14. Lopping off the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Versicles, and the three Collects.

⁴ "Then these five Prayers following are to be read here, *except when the Litany is read*, and then only the two last are to be read, as they are there placed."—*Rubric before the Prayer for the Queen's Majesty in the ORDER FOR MORNING PRAYER.*

Such are the "views" which the petitioners have "submitted to Her Majesty." And if, as they require, the "other alterations" which "might be alluded to," "and which must readily suggest themselves," are to be carried out "in harmony with" these "views," it "must readily suggest itself" that we run a good chance of not having much of our Prayer Book left to us. One knows not whether to be amused or amazed to find the propounders of such "views" whining through two paragraphs at the "palm of superior Churchmanship" not being adjudged to them!

But let us examine more particularly some of the changes which they propose to make.

THE ATHANASIAN CREED. This is to be given up for the sake of what they call "beneficial abbreviation." Let us see what this abbreviation would amount to. This Creed is appointed to be used on thirteen days in the year. Of these thirteen the petitioners themselves abolish at least *seven*⁵ in the following paragraph, leaving only six to be dealt with. The Athanasian Creed occupies about (rather less than) four minutes in reading. Substituting for it, as the petitioners permit, the Nicene Creed, which takes about one minute, the actual

⁵ The Feasts of S. Andrew, S. Matthias, S. John the Baptist, S. James, S. Bartholomew, S. Matthew, and SS. Simon and Jude.

time saved by its omission would be about *three minutes*. And to save three minutes' time on six days in the year, 460 clergymen come forward to demand that the Athanasian Creed shall be struck out of the public service of the Church of England! I say that this is intolerable trifling with a very grave subject.

But the petitioners say that this "abbreviation" would be "especially" beneficial, because "the doctrines" of this Creed "are too abstrusely expressed for common worship." Now, I do not scruple to assert that any clergyman of the Church of England ought to be ashamed to put such a sentiment on paper. The doctrines of the Athanasian Creed are *not* "abstrusely expressed:" they are expressed with the utmost possible perspicuity. The doctrines themselves, of course, involve mysteries which our intelligence cannot fathom. But for any one who thinks these doctrines "sound," as the petitioners profess to do, and who takes no exception to the manner in which they are "expressed" in the *Nicene* Creed, to say that they are "too abstrusely expressed" in the *Athanasian*, is simply preposterous. There is but one clause ("The Father incomprehensible," &c.) which could, in any sense, come within the petitioners' description. And even of this clause the abstruseness is not in the terms themselves: it arises from the

fact that the primary meaning of the word "incomprehensible" is not, in modern times, the common one. But I defy the petitioners to point out one other clause "abstrusely expressed," without exposing themselves to the charge of culpable ignorance of the elementary principles of the theology which they have undertaken to teach. And should any of their flocks be so ill informed as to complain of this Creed being "too abstrusely expressed," I think the petitioners would be employed better, and in a manner more suitable to the sacred office they have assumed, in trying to show these people their mistake, than in petitioning the Queen to deprive them of this great bulwark of their faith.

SAINTS' DAYS. The grounds for abolishing these, as set forth in the Petition, are as follows:—

"That the observance of Saints' Days was matter of strong objection in the Conference of 1661; and though the Services appointed for them are not in themselves examples of the idolatrous worship of saints, yet that the observance appears to many to countenance this error; the most distant tendency to which cannot be too jealously kept clear of by the Church of Christ."

From their reference to the Conference of 1661, I presume they mean to identify their views with those of the Presbyterians at that Conference. This is rather an odd authority for Clergymen of

the Church of England to appeal to, as supporting their views in regard to the Prayer Book. But still, had they taken the trouble to refresh their memory of the proceedings to which they allude, by a reference to "Cardwell's *History of Conferences*," &c., they would hardly have ventured to take shelter under the wing of the Presbyterians of 1661. The objection urged at the Conference is stated in these words:—

"That the religious observation of Saints' Days, appointed to be kept as holy days, and the vigils thereof, without any foundation (as we conceive) in Scripture, may be omitted⁶."

This, at any rate, cannot be called a very "strong objection:" considering the parties who urged it, it rather seems a moderate and qualified one. But the material thing to observe, is the ground on which it is placed. There is not a word said about the observance of these days "appearing to countenance the idolatrous worship of saints," or having any "tendency" that way. Nothing is said but that "as they conceived," it was "without any foundation in Scripture,"—a reason, by the bye, that would sweep away much that the petitioners would probably be willing enough to retain. Unless, therefore, the petitioners wrote in ignorance or forgetfulness (and they ought not to be either ignorant or forgetful) of the proceedings of the

⁶ Cardwell, p. 306.

Conference, it really was not honest to represent themselves as reproducing the objections of 1661.

To come, now, to the objections of the petitioners themselves. I would ask these gentlemen whether, in the clumsy sentence which I have quoted, they are expressing their own sentiments. Let them stand forward, and say plainly whether they believe that the observance of Saints' Days in the Church of England "countenances idolatrous worship," or has "the most distant tendency" to it. If they do, what becomes of their "unfeigned assent and consent to all and every thing contained and prescribed in and by the Book" of Common Prayer? What becomes of their Subscription, (at least in the case of those ordained in Ireland,) by which they bound themselves not to "declare or speak any thing in the derogation or the despising of the said Book?" Can any thing be more derogatory than such a charge? But, of course, they would reply, that they are not expressing their own sentiments: far from it; they only say that the observance of Saints' Days "appears to many" to countenance idolatrous worship. "Appears to many!" To whom does it appear? Is it to Dissenters? Are they, then, prepared to sacrifice every thing that Dissenters object to? Or might it not rather be expected that Clergymen of the Church of England, especially those proclaiming themselves candidates for the "palm of superior Churchmanship," would indignantly repel this

charge as a vile and patent slander, instead of insinuating (as it “appears to many” that they do) that its truth cannot be denied? Or is it the feelings of ill-informed members of our own Church that they are consulting? Then, I say, that they would be acting a much more becoming part, if they were to try to disabuse their flocks of so stupid a prejudice, instead of humouring them by mangling the Prayer Book, and breaking in upon the Church system, which they have solemnly undertaken to administer.

BURIAL SERVICE. Of the *clearances* which they suggest in this Service I will not speak positively, not having an opportunity of referring to the Petition to which they allude. But if my memory does not fail me, I suspect that they will not get more help from the signers of that Petition, than from their Presbyterian friends of 1661. My belief is, that the 4000 Clergy did not ask for an alteration of the Burial Service at all; but wanted only that the State should leave the Church free to exercise her own discipline in regard of its use.

VISITATION OF THE SICK. What sort of change they wish for in the Absolution does not appear very clearly. They do not propose to strike it out; and it so happens that the only “error,” the “semblance” of which they deprecate, is expressly guarded against in the existing Form, in which

the Priest declares that he “absolves” *not* by his own authority, but “by the authority of Christ.” However, if it were not for the danger of altering the Prayer Book at all, there is not a Churchman in the land that would object to any verbal change (if such were possible) that would satisfy weak minds, without compromising the doctrine that God “hath given *power*,” as well as “commandment to His ministers, to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins⁷.”

CONSECRATION and ORDINATION SERVICES, BAPTISMAL SERVICE, OFFICE for CONFIRMATION, and CHURCH CATECHISM. The alterations proposed in these, with the exception of the exclusion of the “Sponsorial element,” being *ejusdem generis*, I shall consider them together.

And, first, I must protest against the statement that “it results from the judgment” of the Privy Council in the Gorham case “(however that judgment may be viewed) that the Churchmanship of those who do not hold Baptismal Regeneration in the absolute sense” (whatever the absolute sense may mean) “is no less good than that of those who do.” No such issue was raised, nor

⁷ *Absolution in the order for MORNING and EVENING PRAYER.* When a Priest absolves a penitent, he does only what the petitioners, every time they read prayers, declare that “God hath given him power” to do.

any thing the least like it. Indeed, so far as the judgment may be thought to bear upon that question, it "appears to many" that the deniers of Baptismal Regeneration barely escaped exclusion from the Church. But the petitioners are so little skilled in the art of writing, that the parenthesis which they throw in almost involves a flat contradiction of their own statement. They say the above result follows, "however that judgment may be viewed." I have just stated one way in which the judgment "may be viewed." Do they mean that "it results from the judgment" according to *that* view, that those who barely escape exclusion from the Church, are as good Churchmen as those whose Churchmanship it would be insanity to doubt?

These, however, are but minor considerations. Whatever the petitioners may feel, there are those who think that the great controversy which unhappily divides the Church, is of a higher order than a paltry squabble about the "palm of superior Churchmanship." There are those who believe that the contest is not about "words and names," but about vital doctrine. There are those who would make the petitioners a present of the "palm," or fling it to the winds, if that were necessary to secure the undisturbed possession of the Catholicity which, through God's mercy, their Church has inherited.

The petitioners say that they "wish only for what is just and reasonable in desiring a Ritual

clear from" the matter at which they take offence in the above-named formularies. Let us see whether their demands can fairly be so designated. How does the case stand? Here are two parties among the Clergy: the one a minority, I believe a very small minority; the other a majority, I believe an overwhelming majority. And here are certain formularies, to which both parties "declare their unfeigned assent and consent." These formularies contain certain "expressions" and large "portions," which the two parties unfortunately interpret differently. The majority believe them to exhibit, and that they were intended to exhibit, two doctrines of vital moment; namely, the transmission of a great spiritual gift by Apostolical Succession, and Regeneration by Baptism: the very being of the Church, in their view, depending on the one; the other being, as they think, an article of the Christian Creed. Be they right or wrong, that is the interpretation which they put on the passages in question. The minority interpret the same passages differently; how, I really do not know, but it is in some manner that they profess to be satisfactory to themselves; for they, equally with their brethren, "declare their unfeigned assent and consent" thereto. What, then, is the amount of grievance that the minority, or rather a small fraction of the minority, complain of? It is not that doctrines are imposed upon them from which they conscientiously dissent: for they deny that the language they object to ex-

presses the doctrines; they interpret it in a different sense, and in that sense assent and consent to it. The whole grievance, therefore, is that they think this language comes so close to, and is so like, an expression of the doctrines, that it is unpleasant to them to use it. And, doubtless, it must be unpleasant, and it is quite natural that they should wish to be relieved from the necessity of using it. But, after all, since they profess to be able conscientiously to assent and consent to this language as it is, it can only be their *taste*, not their *conscience*, which is offended. What, then, is the remedy they ask for? Simply that all the passages in question shall be blotted out of the Prayer Book. That is, they set their taste against their brethren's conscience: and to relieve themselves of a certain amount of unpleasantness—a large amount, let it be admitted—they propose that what the majority consider the Catholicity of the Church should be sacrificed. Now, will any impartial man say that this demand is “only just and reasonable?” Is the grievance of which they complain, in the retention of these passages, to be put in the balance against that which they want to impose upon their brethren, in the renunciation by the Church of what *they* deem vital Christian doctrine?

The petitioners say that “they are the more solicitous” to have these alterations carried into effect, because they think it would be the means of restoring “peace” to the Church. But surely they must

know that it would be impossible for their opponents to accept these alterations; that they, or at any rate the great bulk of them, must withdraw from the communion of a Church that would seem to them to be voluntarily embracing heresy; and, therefore, that their wished-for "peace" would be gained, only by the expulsion of thousands of faithful ministers from the Church. Are the petitioners desirous of this? I hope not. But it would not be the first time that extermination has been called "peace." *Solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant.*

To advocate changes in the Prayer Book, and the system of the Church of England, so sweeping as those which we have reviewed, besides others which we are told "must readily suggest themselves," does seem so extraordinary in men who have "declared their unfeigned assent and consent to all and every thing," which they propose to sweep away, that curiosity is excited to know how the apparent inconsistency is to be explained. The petitioners seem to think that some reference to the subject would be expected from them; and accordingly they do refer to it; but certainly not in a manner to give the desired explanation, because it is impossible to believe that they mean what they say. They premise that they "advance nothing touching their assent and consent,"—which is not very enlightening on the point in hand. But

though they say they “advance nothing,” they do immediately “advance” something, and something very queer. They advance a principle, which, if it means any thing, means that they do not consider their declaration of assent and consent to have any binding force at all. Now I, for one, do not accept this as the true explanation of the Petition. I cannot believe that the petitioners intended to “advance” any such principle; though what they did intend I cannot pretend to guess. I cannot doubt that they were honest in their declaration of “assent and consent,” and that they do consider themselves bound thereby. But their *words* mean what I have said; and the only moral obliquity which I charge upon them, is that of rashness and presumption in thrusting themselves forward as improvers of the Prayer Book, when they know not how to express their own sentiments in intelligible language. Their words are these:—

“Finally, your Majesty’s petitioners advance nothing touching their assent and consent to the Liturgy as it is, but earnestly plead for improvements, of which it is obviously, urgently, and easily susceptible, as they would seek alterations for the better in the laws of the land to which they bear true allegiance.”

With the most sincere desire not to misrepresent the writers of this sentence, I really can infer nothing from it, but that they consider that their declaration of “assent and consent” imposed no

obligation upon them in regard of the Book of Common Prayer, *in addition to* the general obligation they are under to obey the laws of the land. Now, is this a principle that any honest man can admit? Will any honest man gravely maintain that in exacting from the Clergy this public and solemn declaration, the Legislature intends nothing but to test their allegiance as peaceful citizens? Are there not many laws upon the Statute Book, to which the petitioners would yield obedience for conscience sake, but to which they would sooner cut off their right hand than “declare their unfeigned assent and consent?” Is Mr. Spooner to be considered to have declared his “unfeigned assent and consent” to the Maynooth Endowment, because he is not prepared to organize an insurrection for its repeal? I repeat, that I do not mean to insinuate a doubt of the *bona fides* of the petitioners. But in the name of honour, of straightforwardness, and of common sense, let it not go forth as the sentiment of any section of the Clergy, that their declaration of unqualified approval of the whole contents of the Prayer Book, bound them to nothing but *not to be rebels*.

P.S. Since these Remarks went to press, I have seen a letter from Rev. D. Nihill, one of the signers of the Petition, in the *Guardian*, of January 18. It certainly was new to me to learn that, as Mr. Nihill informs us, there is a “general

consent" among the Clergy that the words "all and every thing contained and prescribed in and by," are to be "construed" to signify only "in the main." It would seem to those who have no fancy for "non-natural interpretations," that the words must have been chosen for the express purpose of precluding the possibility of such a construction. But to let that pass, how can those who advocate the changes proposed and hinted at in this Petition, be said to yield "a hearty approbation to the Prayer Book in the main?" I suspect that Mr. Nihill would find that he puts a very "liberal construction" on his own term. By the way I see, in the same number of the *Guardian*, that Dr. McNeile, in his letter to the Dean of Westminster, states that what "for a series of years" conduced "to peace and unity" in the Church, was that the Prayer Book was "naturally interpreted" by the Clergy "on both sides;" whereas Mr. Nihill avows that on one side at least they give "a non-natural interpretation." I must leave it to Dr. McNeile and his co-petitioner to settle this difference; only remarking that when the petitioners themselves take such contradictory views of the Prayer Book they are objecting to, it is impossible to imagine that any Prayer Book they would put in its place would long secure "peace and unity."

By the same Author.

SERMONS,

PREACHED AT ROME,

During the Seasons of 1580—1851, and 1851—1852.



